Definiteness in Akan (Kwa): Familiarity and uniqueness revisited

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Overview Contrary to previous claims (Arkoh & Matthewson 2013, hereafter A&M), I show that the Akan determiner *no* is a uniqueness definite, whose behaviour can be clearly delimited from that of the familiarity demonstrative *saa...no*. The analysis, based on original fieldwork, has wider typological implications: it questions the importance of anaphora to delimit familiarity definites, and identifies a further source of variation in the domain of definiteness: the competition between an overt uniqueness determiner and the bare noun.

Background In the literature, Akan (Kwa, Niger-Congo) has been argued to support Schwarz's (2009, 2013) theory of definiteness: A&M propose that Akan, like German, encodes a uniqueness definite (bare noun) and a familiarity definite (*no*), in addition to a distal demonstrative (*saa...no*). This analysis faces major empirical issues: based on A&M's own examples, *no* appears not only in typical familiarity contexts (anaphora), but also in uniqueness contexts (larger situations, Hawkins 1978). This is in conflict with the antecedent requirement of the familiarity definite. Further, *saa...no* is not investigated, even though it is briefly identified as a familiarity marker and is thus expected to pattern like *no*.

Data and Analysis In this paper, and contrary to A&M, I propose that *no* is a uniqueness definite—a Fregean definite with a situational domain restriction, (1a). By contrast, the demonstrative *saa...no* is a familiarity definite, (1b): it encodes an additional referential index (whose reference is resolved via an assignment function *g*), and it introduces a co-reference requirement (Schwarz 2009).

(1) a. $[\![$ *no* $]\!] = \lambda s_r \lambda P: \exists!x\ (P(x)(s_r)).\ \iota x\ [P(x)(s_r)]$
     b. $[\![$ *saa...no* $]\!] = \lambda s_r \lambda P.\lambda y: \exists!x\ (P(x)(s_r)\ \&\ x{=}y).\ \iota x\ [P(x)(s_r)\ \&\ x{=}y]$

The main evidence for my proposal is that *no* regularly occurs in uniqueness contexts: for instance, it can be used to refer to the sun (which is globally unique, (2)) or to a headmaster at a school (larger situation, (3)).

(2) *On a bus, a stranger says:*
    Awia no a-bɔ   ɛnne.
    sun   DEF PRF-hit today
    'The sun is shining today.'

(3) *A school teacher explains to a new colleague:*
    Headmaster no bɛ-ma   wo timetable.
    headmaster   DEF FUT-give 2SG timetable
    'The headmaster will give you a timetable.'

Further support for the uniqueness of *no* is that its distribution differs from that of *saa...no*, which *is* a familiarity marker in the sense of (1b): the demonstrative is not allowed in (2)–(3) (where sun/headmaster are not pre-mentioned or immediately perceptible) but it is possible in (4), in which an anaphoric antecedent is available.

(4) Me-tɔ-ɔ   atadeɛ. **(Saa) Atadeɛ no** yɛ   fɛ.
    1SG-buy-PST dress   DEM   dress   DEF COP beutiful
    'I bought a dress. That/The dress is beautiful.'

The analysis extends the definitions in (1) by acknowledging further licit uses of each definite. The anaphoric uses of *no* in A&M are analysed as also involving uniqueness (cf. Roberts 2003): in (4), there is only one pre-mentioned dress—thus, in the common ground, there is only one entity with the NP-property in the resource situation s_r, meeting the uniqueness presupposition of *no*. In turn, *saa...no* occurs not only in anaphora, but also in deixis, (5). This use is captured by (1b): the

context supplies an immediately perceptible entity for the demonstrative to refer to (deictic antecedent, Simonenko 2014).

(5) Me-pɛ **saa car no** nanso me-m-pɛ **saa car no**.
1SG-like DEM car DEF but 1SG-NEG-like DEM car DEF
'I like that car [pointing at car 1] but I don't like that car [pointing at car 2].'

No differs from other uniqueness markers (Frisian *a*, English *the*) in being optional in (2)–(3). I attribute this difference to lexical competition. In English, *the* competes with the indefinite *a*. The obligatoriness of *the* in (2) is commonly attributed to the principle of Maximize Presupposition (MP, Heim 1991): sentences containing the presuppositionally stronger *the sun* are chosen over *a sun* if uniqueness is satisfied. In contrast to English, Akan has a bare noun option (an NP), which differs syntactically from the *no*-phrase (a DP). Syntactic differences between competing structures have been argued to make MP without effect in the context of optional tense markers (Mucha 2015, Bochnak 2016). This approach can be extended to the DP-domain: because they have different LFs, sentences with the bare NP and those with *no* are not in the same set of alternatives on which MP would operate, leading to free alternation in (2)–(3).

Language-internal consequences Schwarz (2009) proposes the following structure for familiarity definites: [DP 1 [[D sr] NP]]—where D spells out ι, and 1 represents the index argument of the determiner. On my analysis, *saa...no* can be seen as separately expressing each component: *no* spells out D/ι, and *saa* spells out the index. Further, my proposal predicts scope differences between *no* and *saa...no* (Simonenko 2014): *saa...no* should be scopeless relative to quantifiers over situations (*every Friday* in (6)), and could only refer to a particular pre-mentioned book via its referential index. By contrast, *every Friday* can bind the situation index of *no*: there should thus be a reading where there is one book every Friday, each time a different one. Preliminary evidence, to be confirmed before the talk, suggests that this is the case.

(6) *Every week, A. reads a different book.* Every Friday, she borrows **(?saa) book no** from the library.

Conclusion The analysis presented in this paper requires considerable revisions to recent typologies of definites (Schwarz 2013, Jenks 2017). First, it identifies a further language type: one which, like German, lexicalises both familiarity and uniqueness definites, but which, unlike German (and like Thai, Jenks 2015), also has a bare NP option. Second, according to previous typologies, a crucial diagnostic for distinguishing uniqueness and familiarity definites is whether they occur in anaphora. My analysis shifts the emphasis to how reference is established: both determiners can refer in anaphora, but they do so by different means—uniqueness via situational domain restriction, and familiarity via a referential index. This shift receives cross-linguistic support: similar overlaps in anaphora are observed in Germanic (weak-strong articles, Studler 2008), English (*the–that*, Wolter 2006) and Mandarin (bare NP–DEM, Jenks 2017). Overall, although the categories in (1) are available cross-linguistically, it is necessary to rethink them conceptually—a rethinking which comes with empirical consequences, such as what constitutes a good diagnostic for each determiner type.

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